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Cooperation between the United Nations and regional and other organizations

Cooperation between the United Nations and the League of Arab States

Report of the Secretary-General**

Summary

The present annual report of the Secretary-General summarizes the areas of cooperation between the United Nations system and the League of Arab States, including their respective specialized agencies and programmes, for the period from July 2001 to August 2002. Highlights for the period under review include the visit of the Secretary-General to the Summit Meeting of the League of Arab States held in Beirut in March 2002, as well as the convening of a sectoral meeting between the two organizations in Cairo in June 2002 on the topic of the use of information technology in development.

* A/57/150.

** The present report is being submitted on 6 September 2002 in order to include all contributions from the United Nations system.

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I. Introduction

1. The present report is submitted pursuant to paragraph 14 of General Assembly resolution 56/40 of 7 December 2001.

II. Consultations and exchanges of information

2. During the period under review, the secretariats of the United Nations and the League of Arab States, as well as the Office of the Permanent Observer for the League of Arab States to the United Nations, continued to maintain close contact on matters of mutual concern to the two organizations.

3. The Secretary-General attended the Summit Meeting of the League of Arab States held in Beirut on 27 and 28 March 2002. He delivered a statement at the opening session and held a meeting with the Secretary-General of the League of Arab States. The latter also received the United Nations High-level Coordinator appointed pursuant to paragraph 14 of Security Council resolution 1284 (1999) in Cairo on 11 March 2002 to discuss issues pertaining to his mandate. The League of Arab States, and its Secretary-General in particular, played a constructive role in facilitating the agreement by Iraq to return documents belonging to the Kuwaiti archives. In subsequent discussions on the procedure for the transfer of the Kuwaiti archives, it was agreed that the League would send representatives to the transfer area to participate in the handover operation.

4. From 30 April to 2 May 2002, a meeting on cooperation between the United Nations and regional organizations was convened at United Nations Headquarters, in follow-up to the fourth high-level meeting between the Secretary-General and heads of regional organizations held in 2001. The main purpose of the meeting was to develop practical cooperation at the working level in the fields of conflict prevention and peace-building within the framework established at the third and the fourth high-level meetings. A bilateral meeting between working-level representatives of the League of Arab States and the United Nations was also arranged, in which capacity-building for the secretariat of the League of Arab States, cooperation in economic issues, disarmament and humanitarian issues were discussed.

III. Follow-up action on proposals agreed to at general meetings between organizations of the United Nations system and the League of Arab States

5. A summary of the reports of the organizations and agencies of the United Nations system on their cooperation with the League of Arab States during the period under review follows. It represents the follow-up action on proposals adopted at the meeting between the United Nations and the League of Arab States in Vienna in 2001 (see A/56/474, sect. IV).

A. United Nations Secretariat

Department of Public Information

6. United Nations Radio continued its coverage of developments related to the League of Arab States and the United Nations through its daily live broadcasts and current affairs magazines in official and non-official languages. The events that were covered include, among others: the Summit Meeting of the League of Arab States held in Beirut in March 2002; the meeting between the United Nations Secretary-General and the Secretary-General of the League of Arab States; and the meeting of the West Asia regional preparatory committee for the World Summit for Sustainable Development, hosted by the League of Arab States in October 2001.

7. In an effort to strengthen their cooperation in the future, the Director of the United Nations Information Centre in Cairo held a series of meetings with the Director of the Information Department of the League of Arab States to discuss proposals for future joint outreach programmes. In January 2002, the Director of the information centre in Cairo was invited to attend the International Conference on Human Rights and Terrorism organized by the League of Arab States.

8. United Nations Radio also conducted interviews on various issues and topics with members of the League of Arab States. Members interviewed include the Secretary-General of the League of Arab States during his participation in the general debate of the fifty-sixth session of the General Assembly in early November 2001; the outgoing Secretary-General of the League on his association with the United Nations; the

spokesperson for the League of Arab States on United Nations-League of Arab States relations; and the Director of Disarmament Affairs of the League during a meeting of the Disarmament Committee on nuclear disarmament and related issues.

B. Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia

9. The main thrust of cooperation between the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA) and the League of Arab States and its subsidiary bodies focused on preparations, at the regional level, for United Nations global conferences. This partnership ensured a wider geographical coverage that extended beyond ESCWA member States to all Arab countries. Efforts in this direction revolved around sensitizing member States and other stakeholders to key issues to be discussed at global conferences, and included the provision of briefings in Arabic to assist in eliminating the language barrier; provision of technical assistance in negotiating key issues, especially in relation to accession to the World Trade Organization Agreement; and the holding of a series of informal and formal meetings at the ministerial level.

10. Cooperation in preparing for United Nations global conferences included forming a joint secretariat to prepare for the World Summit on Sustainable Development, composed of ESCWA, the League of Arab States and the Regional Office of the United Nations Environment Programme. This involved holding a series of seven preparatory meetings with member States and other stakeholders. The meetings provided a regional platform outlining key issues, priorities and actions to be addressed at the World Summit. Moreover, a total of 18 briefing papers were prepared, in Arabic, on key issues. Preparations were also made for the Fourth Ministerial Conference of the World Trade Organization to be held in Doha, Qatar, from 9 to 14 November 2002.

11. A third world event that involved collaboration between the two organizations was the Second World Assembly on Ageing, held in Madrid from 8 to 12 April 2002. A one-day meeting was organized immediately prior to the opening of the Assembly to brief the Arab delegations on the status of negotiations regarding the International Plan of Action on Ageing. This activity was preceded in February 2002 by the Arab regional preparatory meeting for the Second World Assembly on Ageing for both ministers and experts, which resulted in the Arab Plan of Action on Ageing for the years leading up to 2012.

12. ESCWA and the League of Arab States, in partnership with the United Nations Children Fund (UNICEF), collaborated in organizing regional preparations that led to the adoption of the Arab Framework for Action and an action plan on the right of children as a common input by the Arab countries to the special session of the General Assembly on children. Other areas of cooperation included a draft project on Arab youth employment, jointly prepared by ESCWA and the Arab Labour Organization.

C. United Nations Conference on Trade and Development

13. The secretariat of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and the League of Arab States organized a meeting of high-level technical experts, which was hosted by Qatar and held in Doha in September 2001. The outcome of the expert group was considered at a ministerial meeting held in October 2001.

14. Immediately following the ministerial conference, UNCTAD and the League of Arab States began to work jointly to analyse the implications of the Doha Ministerial Declaration for Arab countries and to identify priority areas for technical assistance to enable the Arab countries to participate effectively in the Doha Work Programme.

15. In addition, the League of Arab States requested UNCTAD technical assistance in the area of competition policy, more specifically, the establishment of a common competition policy for the Arab Free Trade Area. The project has been developed and is expected to be launched in the latter part of 2002.

D. United Nations Development Programme

16. Collaboration between the League of Arab States and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) is grounded in a substantive partnership to serve Arab people. Priorities of the League in the developmental field and the UNDP regional

cooperation framework for Arab States provide the context for joint activities and programmes. Collaboration took place in the areas of human development, information communications technology for development, as well as trade and support to the Palestinian people.

17. The joint launch of the Arab Human Development Report, with the participation of the Secretary-General of the League of Arab States, at the headquarters of the League in Cairo, was a landmark event that strengthened the partnership and set the stage for even stronger cooperation.

18. Collaboration took place within the framework of the ongoing project of cooperation between the League of Arab States and UNDP for the promotion of human development in the Arab region. Capacity-building activities covered the areas of information, communication technologies and trade. A number of publications were produced on human development, gender and globalization in the Arab region.

E. United Nations Development Fund for Women

19. The United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) Arab States Regional Office in Amman participates in the annual meetings of the Arab Women's Committee. In October 2002, the office is scheduled to participate in the first conference of the Arab Forum on Human Development, as well as in the Second Arab Women's Summit organized by the League of Arab States and other Arab organizations and scheduled to be held in November 2002. The office will also cooperate with the League of Arab States to implement the regional project, entitled "Arab women parliamentarians".

F. United Nations Population Fund

20. During the period under review, cooperation between the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the League of Arab States was strengthened as a number of significant joint activities marked the year. The three main areas of focus were: (a) data collection and analysis (signified by projects such as the Pan Arab Family Health Survey); (b) advocacy (by the holding of conferences on issues such as youth, migration, gender and poverty); and (c) support to the Population Research Unit.

21. In the context of its regional programme, UNFPA provided the League of Arab States, particularly its Department of Social Affairs, with technical, institutional and financial assistance. This was done in support of the Pan Arab Family Health Survey, which is expected to generate a regional database characterized by compatibility and application of new standardized methodologies. Consultations for survey planning were carried out in Djibouti, Lebanon, the Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic, Tunisia and Yemen. Actual surveys were completed in the Syrian Arab Republic and Tunisia. Analysis of data will begin in the near future.

22. UNFPA also contributed financial and technical support to strengthen the capacity of the League of Arab States Population Research Unit, which is designed to help the organization to conduct research and analysis on areas such as morbidity, mortality, reproductive health, gender and family structure and nuptiality.

G. United Nations Children's Fund

23. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) Regional Office for the Middle East and North Africa continued to collaborate with the League of Arab States during the period under review. The office participated in the meeting between the United Nations and the League of Arab States held in Vienna in July 2001 and presented a paper on information technology applications in support of programmes for children at the sectoral meeting between the League of Arab States and the United Nations held in Cairo in June 2002.

24. In preparation for the special session of the General Assembly on children, the League of Arab States convened the Second Arab High-Level Conference on Children in July 2001 to review the progress made towards achieving the goals of the World Summit for Children and to identify future courses of action. As part of the preparations, UNICEF supported regional meetings for experts, civil society organizations and youth. UNICEF also supported a study of lessons learned from the reporting process of member States of the League of Arab States to the Committee on the Rights of the Child and provided technical inputs to the drafting of the outcome

document of the Second Arab High-Level Conference on Children, entitled "An Arab world fit for Children." This process resulted in the adoption of two resolutions on children by the Arab Summits held in Amman in 2001 and in Beirut in 2002.

H. World Food Programme

25. A memorandum of understanding between the World Food Programme (WFP) and the League of Arab States that will allow for regular consultations and exchange of information between the two parties was finalized and is currently being approved by all member States. Provisions were also made for joint action in areas of common interest. More specifically, WFP and the League of Arab States identified food insecurity and malnutrition, particularly among women and children, as focus areas for potential joint action. To ensure regular contacts, both organizations agreed that representatives from the other party would participate in decision-making bodies within their respective structures.

26. WFP participated in the sectoral meeting between the League of Arab States and the United Nations. During the meeting, at which WFP presented a working paper highlighting its vulnerability analysis and mapping approaches to decision-making and allocation of resources. Several member States of the League of Arab States expressed interest in learning more about the project and in using some of its techniques. The sectoral meeting also stressed the need for the development of data collection and management on the issue of food security, the need to collect and manage data on the issue of drought, and the need to develop training modules and programmes in Arabic by using the Arab Administration Development Organization experience.

I. United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East

27. The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) continued to cooperate with the League of Arab States over the course of the past year, primarily on matters pertaining to education services. UNRWA provided services for some 483,000 Palestinian refugee students in elementary and preparatory schools located in Jordan, Lebanon, the Syrian Arab Republic, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip.

28. Cooperation with the League of Arab States was maintained through the League's Council of Educational Affairs for Palestinians. The Council's eleventh joint meeting was held at the League's secretariat headquarters in Cairo in December 2001 and was attended by the most senior UNRWA education officials from each of its five fields of operation, as well as the Chief of the Education Planning and Management. The Agency's educational activities and achievements were assessed at the meeting, as were the main obstacles hindering implementation of education services. In addition, problems faced by UNRWA regarding its education staff, students, school buildings, school curriculum and education accessories were also discussed. Views were exchanged regarding the best means to remove obstacles. A report produced following the meeting provided a comprehensive review of the development and status of cooperation in the field between UNRWA and member States of the League of Arab States.

29. UNRWA also maintained high-level contacts with the League of Arab States. The Commissioner-General of UNRWA attended the League of Arab States summit held in Beirut in March 2002.

J. Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

30. Throughout the reporting period, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) continued its regular dialogue with the League of Arab States on specific human rights issues in the Arab countries. The High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Secretary-General of the League of Arab States discussed on several occasions the ongoing situation in the Middle East and in the occupied Palestinian territory where violence and loss of life were considered to be a matter of grave concern.

31. When on mission in the Arab region in March 2002, the High Commissioner met with the Secretary-General of the League of Arab States in Cairo, where they reviewed a number of issues relating to the human rights situation in Arab countries and discussed ways to enhance the cooperation between the two secretariats. Reference was made to the development of regional

strategies and cooperation with regional organizations, a key priority of OHCHR, and to the appointment of two OHCHR regional representatives for the Arab region in Beirut.

32. Subsequently, on 17 April 2002, while attending the fifty-eighth session of the Commission on Human Rights in Geneva, the Secretary-General of the League of Arab States conferred once again with the High Commissioner for Human Rights. They signed a memorandum of intent outlining cooperative endeavours between the two secretariats in the field of human rights. The memorandum provided a framework for further cooperation aimed at establishing a technical assistance cooperation programme in the field of human rights, including training of secretariat staff, joint meetings and seminars, exchange of information and documentation, mutual consultation and cooperation.

K. International Labour Organization

33. The International Labour Organization (ILO) continued to maintain close cooperation with the League of Arab States, particularly with its specialized organizations and institutions: the Arab Labour Organization, the Institute of Occupational Health and Safety in Damascus, the Arab Centre for Labour Administration and Employment in Tunis, the Institute of Social Security in the Sudan, the Institute of Worker's Education in Algeria, and the Institute for Training in the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya.

34. Over the course of the past biennium, several developments took place between ILO and the Arab League. In accordance with a memorandum of understanding that was signed in 2000, ILO and the Arab Labour Organization launched an activity to establish a labour market information library. It was designed to improve the reliability and coherence of the data on the labour market in the Arab regions and to facilitate the exchange of information on employment. Throughout the period under review, ILO also continued to provide financial and technical support towards the development of the Arab Centre for Labour Administration and Employment. In addition, ILO worked with the Arab Labour Organization and the Institute of Occupational Health and Safety in the area of occupational safety and health. Activities included the organization of seminars and training courses, the translation of materials into Arabic, and the publication of materials in Arabic.

L. Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

35. The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) worked closely with the League of Arab States and some of its specialized agencies through cooperative programmes and activities. Cooperation was coordinated mainly at the FAO Regional Office for the Near East, and particularly with the Inter-Agency Task Force. FAO contributed technically and financially to the implementation of joint programmes and activities. Both organizations worked together in coordinating workshops, conferences, activities and mobilization of resources during the period under review in areas such as food security, animal disease control, water sanitation, organic farming and economic development.

M. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

36. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) continued to strengthen its cooperation with the League of Arab States. The UNESCO Cairo Office participated in the sectoral meeting between the League of Arab States and the United Nations, held at the headquarters of the League in Cairo from 18 to 20 June 2002.

37. UNESCO presented the International Computer Driving License programme at the sectoral meeting. The internationally recognized certification programme was launched by the UNESCO Cairo Office and aims to establish a benchmark for basic computer skills for the population in member States. The project should be regarded as a strategic initiative for capacity-building.

38. The Arab League Educational, Cultural, and Scientific Organization (ALECSO) participated in the thirteenth consultation of the International Technical Advisory Group for the Internationally Developed Data Analysis and Management Software Package (IDAMS), held at UNESCO in Paris, from 1 to 3 October 2001, and reported that ten Arab countries had organized training seminars for IDAMS in 2001. Similar activities were planned for the year 2002 in six other Arab countries.

N. International Civil Aviation Organization

39. The International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) and the Arab Civil Aviation Commission (ACAC), which was established under the auspices of the League of Arab States, continued to cooperate in air transport matters. ICAO continued to provide guidance to the Commission in the development of a regional agreement among member States. ICAO will cooperate with the Commission to organize a symposium on the topic of Inter-Arab Air Transport Liberalization that will be held in Dubai from 21 to 23 October 2002. The symposium will address the recent developments regarding the liberalization of air transport, both at the regional and the international levels, as well as provide an opportunity for States in the region to prepare for the Worldwide Air Transport Conference to be held at ICAO headquarters in Montréal, Canada from 24 to 29 March 2003.

40. On the subject of aviation security, ICAO continued to address training issues within the region by using expertise and facilities of the training centres located in Casablanca, Morocco and Amman. ICAO participated in a safety and security seminar in Kuwait in March 2002, and will conduct a regional aviation security and facilitation seminar in Amman, from 23 to 27 September 2003.

O. International Telecommunication Union

41. The International Telecommunication Union (ITU) participated in the sectoral meeting between the League of Arab States and the United Nations. Recommendations emanating from the meeting included: the need to bridge the digital divide in the Arab region; setting up databases and sustaining the "Arab content" on the Internet; organizing an Arab preparatory meeting on communication and information technology, in order to coordinate efforts before the World Summit on the Information Society; and holding talks on programmes that serve the development in the Arab region by using the communication and information technology. A memorandum of understanding between the ITU and the League of Arab States is expected to be signed in the near future.

P. Universal Postal Union

42. Cooperation between the Universal Postal Union (UPU) and the League of Arab States continued. Their activities were coordinated by the Arab Permanent Postal Commission, which consists of all the postal administrations of the member countries of the League of Arab States.

43. UPU continued to work with the Arab Permanent Postal Commission and organized activities such as seminars, workshops, training courses and symposiums. There have also been initiatives taken to improve the postal technology in member States of the League. Several purchases of equipment have been made in line with UPU programmes.

Q. World Meteorological Organization

44. During the biennium 2001-2002, the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) continued to work very closely with the National Meteorological and Hydrological Services of League of Arab States members through its Permanent Committee for Meteorology. Members of the League of Arab States actively contributed to the programmes of WMO. In particular, contributions were made to the World Weather Watch and World Climate Programme, the Atmospheric Research and Environment Programme and the Hydrology and Water Resources Programme. WMO also continued to provide technical assistance to National Meteorological Services in areas such as data processing, capacity-building, as well as observation and telecommunication facilities.

R. United Nations Industrial Development Organization

45. During the period under review, the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO) undertook efforts to strengthen cooperation with the League of Arab States and its specialized institutions. In this connection, the Director-General of UNIDO met with the Executive Secretary of ESCWA in September 2001 at UNIDO headquarters to review progress on cooperation between ESCWA, the Arab Industrial Development and Mining Organization and UNIDO, as well as to identify means and priorities for more focused and result-oriented activities. This

resulted in the issuance of a joint communiqué on 28 September 2001 that set out the following priorities for cooperation: development of a regional scheme for accreditation; market access facilitation; technology innovation; technology foresight groups; and technology cooperation for poverty alleviation.

46. UNIDO also continued to support the League of Arab States and its specialized institutions through participation in various general, sectoral and expert meetings. UNIDO participated in the general meeting on cooperation held in Vienna on 17-19 July 2001, as well as in the sectoral meeting held in Cairo.

47. In order to strengthen investment promotion capacity in the region, UNIDO has also conducted a series of group training programmes on investment project preparation and appraisal with the participation of various regional institutions, such as the Islamic Development Bank and the Arab Bank for Economic Development in Africa. At present, efforts are being made to expand these training programmes to a larger number of institutions in the region.

IV. Sectoral meeting on cooperation between the secretariats of the United Nations system and the League of Arab States and its specialized organizations

48. As recommended by the General Assembly in its resolution 56/40 and in accordance with the decisions of the 2001 General Meeting of the United Nations and the League of Arab States, a sectoral meeting on the use of information technology in development between the United Nations and the League of Arab States was held in Cairo from 18 to 20 June 2002.

49. Representatives of the United Nations system at the meeting included the United Nations Secretariat (Department of Political Affairs and the Department of Public Information) ESCWA, UNCTAD, the United Nations International Drug Control Programme, UNEP, UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF, WFP, ILO, FAO, ICAO, ITU, UPU, WMO and UNIDO. From the League of Arab States, participants included the Arab League Educational, Cultural and Scientific Organization, the Arab States Broadcasting Union, the Council of Arab Interior Ministers Council, the Arab Centre for the Studies of Arid Zones and Dry Lands, the Arab Organization for Agricultural Development, the Arab Industrial Development and Mining Organization, the Arab Administrative Development Organization, the Arab Labour Organization, the Arab Monetary Fund, the Council of Arab Economic Unity, the Arab Bank for Economic Development in Africa, the Arab Satellite Communications Organization, the Inter-Arab Investment Guarantee Corporation, the Organization of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries, the Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development, the Arab Academy for Science and Technology and Marine Transport, the Arab Atomic Energy Agency, the Arab Civil Aviation Commission and the Arab Authority for Agricultural Investment and Development.

50. The meeting was co-chaired by the Secretary-General for the League of Arab States and the Executive Secretary of ESCWA. The participants discussed ten working papers, reviewed progress on cooperation in the use of information technology in development and made a number of recommendations for future action. In addition, consultations on cooperation between the Department of Political Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat and the Department of Political and International Affairs of the League of Arab States were held informally at the meeting.